



County of San Diego

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RECEIVED

July 13, 2010

The Honorable Kevin Enright
Presiding Judge, San Diego Superior Court
220 West Broadway
San Diego, CA 92101

JUL 22 2010

SAN DIEGO
COUNTY GRAND JURY

Dear Judge Enright,

On July 13, 2010, the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors approved responses to nine Grand Jury reports that addressed findings and recommendations to the County of San Diego. The Board further directed that these responses be sent to your office. The reports for which responses are attached are titled:

- Ethical Political Practices-Enforcement of Campaign and Lobbying Laws
- Transitional Age Youth: Navigating a Difficult Course to Independent Living
- Homeless in San Diego
- San Diego County Detention Facility Inspection Report
- Proposition 63 Mental Health Services Act
- The Substance Abuse Recovery Management System (SARMS)
- Ethics in Government- Code of Ethics, Internal Control, Fraud Hotlines
- Efficiency in Government-Managed Competition, Outsourcing, Reengineering and Reverse Auction Within San Diego County
- Medical Marijuana in San Diego

The Board is scheduled to consider the County's response to a 10th report titled "Eye Gnats in San Diego County" on August 3, 2010. That response will complete the County's obligations to the 2009-2010 Grand Jury and will be sent to you as soon as Board approval is obtained. If you have any questions, please contact me at (619) 531-5250.

Sincerely,

WALTER F. EKARD

Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment

cc: Board of Supervisors

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
RESPONSE TO 2009/10 GRAND JURY REPORT
“Substance Abuse Recovery Management System (SARMS)”
Issued May 25, 2010

Finding #01: The modification of the SARMS Program includes the elimination of the role of SARMS case managers who generally follow a case from start to finish and ensure that all court ordered requirements are being followed by substance abusing parents.

Response: Disagree. The role of SARMS case managers will be maintained by CWS social workers. The social worker is currently the primary case manager, and will continue in that role, tracking and monitoring the parent’s participation in all activities as part of the reunification plan, including alcohol and drug treatment. In addition, staff contracted through Alcohol and Drug Services (ADS) will serve as liaisons between the Court and treatment programs, working with the Dependency Court and providing immediate screening and treatment referral for parents. (See Recommendation 10-57.)

Finding #02: CWS Social Workers will be assigned the case management function heretofore performed by SARMS staff.

Response: Agree in part. Referrals to treatment, previously handled by SARMS case managers, will still be made by staff contracted through Alcohol and Drug Services at each of the regional court houses. As mentioned above, the CWS social worker has always been the primary case manager who is responsible for ensuring and documenting parents’ compliance with all elements of the CWS Case Plan, including substance abuse treatment.

Finding #03: There is a lack of communication between the social workers and CWS administration. As of May 1, 2010, many of the social workers had no knowledge of the pending modification to the SARMS Program and were unaware that they would be assuming the duties and responsibilities of case management services previously provided by SARMS case managers.

Response: Disagree. CWS social workers were initially advised of changes via the CCWS Director’s monthly newsletter, e-mailed to all staff on March 30, 2010. Subsequent conversations with staff occurred after contractors were notified of funding and service reductions.

Finding #04: With an increase in workloads, County social workers will be hard pressed to balance the new responsibility of monitoring compliance with substance abuse treatment with other ongoing responsibilities such as mandatory visits, court appearances, and organizing visitation with foster children and their families.

Response: Disagree. Under the new design, treatment referrals and treatment services will be provided through ADS contractors. Social workers will continue to be aware of, and monitor all aspects of compliance with their cases, including alcohol or other drug use, as consistent with CWS policy and best practice. E-Court, the electronic reporting system regarding substance abuse treatment compliance, will allow CWS social workers to monitor clients’ progress more closely.

Finding #05: Modification of the SARMS Program will impact the compliance reporting system and create a gap and a delay in obtaining pertinent up-to-date information such as compliance by parents, their current status in the program, and if and when they may have tested positive.

Response: Disagree. The modification of the SARMS reporting process will permit CWS and Court staff to obtain information through the web-based E-Court system rather than relying on manual hard copies. The substance abuse treatment providers will enter any non-compliant events and notify CWS within the required time frames. Staff and attorneys have also been trained to access information via E-Court.

Finding #06: Delays resulting from the increased social worker workloads may result in a longer time to achieve family reunification.

Response: Disagree. We do not expect any significant increase in workload, and do not expect delays in family reunification.

Finding #07: Clients who fail to meet court-ordered treatment standards, will be summarily removed from the drug abuse program putting at risk their opportunity to be reunited with their families. The timely transfer of information is necessary for the social worker to determine when and if a client is ready for reunification.

Response: Disagree. When substance abuse is identified as a factor in abuse or neglect, treatment and recovery services are required. Clients participating in treatment, even if they are struggling, are not summarily removed. It is recognized that many clients will experience difficulty. The treatment counselors are trained to work with clients to help them overcome barriers to recovery. However, clients who do not participate in treatment are not complying with the CWS requirements for reunification and risk the opportunity to reunite with their children.

Finding #08: Delayed or unsuccessful outcomes in reunification efforts will cost the County more in foster care payments and supportive services.

Response: Agree. For this reason efforts will continue to focus on reunification.

Finding #09: Human service programs stimulate the economy and investing in these programs substantially reduces the need for and the cost of future services.

Response: Agree in part. The impact of human service programs relative to stimulating the economy is subject to a number of unknown variables.

Finding #10: There are costly long-term effects associated with reducing human services expenditures and case worker staffing levels such as ongoing poverty, a rise in child maltreatment, an increase in the number of domestic violence cases, and an advance towards continued substance abuse.

Response: Agree in part. Studies show that there are strong relationships among child maltreatment, poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse. However, it should be noted that the redesign of this program will have no effect on treatment funding or services.

Finding #11: Social workers have concerns regarding the pending cuts to SARMS, such as their inability to effectively serve their clients and manage caseloads.

Response: Agree. CWS will make every effort to address concerns through multiple training sessions designed specifically for these social workers.

Finding #12: Social workers are anticipating even higher levels of stress and are concerned about the retention of their colleagues.

Response: Agree. Due to the economic downturn and its impact on available program funding, all County workers are faced with new challenges, often “doing more with less.” CWS will monitor this program redesign and make every effort to address staff concerns as they arise.

Finding #13: There is no central source to coordinate services between treatment programs, CWS and other service providers. The creation of the position of a resource coordinator, who would have familiarity with all substance abuse treatment programs throughout the County and maintain waiting lists for client placement, would help facilitate the program placement efforts of CWS Social Workers.

Response: Disagree. Through an alcohol and drug contracted provider, Substance Abuse Specialists (SAS) are currently stationed at the courthouse daily from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. to screen and refer clients to appropriate treatment facilities. This service will continue after July 1. The SAS is familiar with the various treatment programs and experienced in screening for the appropriate services. They also maintain current information regarding treatment capacity and are responsible for referring and tracking clients until they are enrolled in treatment. Having the substance abuse staff at the courthouse allows for immediate access to services and is a recognized strength of this system.

The 2009/2010 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the Chief Administrative Officer of the County of San Diego direct that the Director of the Health and Human Services Agency and the Director of Child Welfare Services:

Recommendation 10-55: Identify and evaluate possible funding sources that would support reinstating the SARMS Program.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented. Although funding constraints were taken into consideration, the decision to redesign substance abuse services was based on many factors.

When SARMS was developed in 1996, there had been virtually no precedent for it, especially in Dependency Court. Since that time, there has been a considerable amount of new research on related issues, which has led to several program design changes over four years. We believe this upcoming program redesign will not result in a lack of services or delays in family reunification.

Recommendation 10-56: If the program is not reinstated, evaluate the social and economic impact of the SARMS Program modifications after one year.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Staff will continue to measure and evaluate the multiple outcomes we currently track, one of which is

the rate of timely reunification. In this way, the County can assess the program redesign on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 10-57: Provide some mechanism, such as creating a new resource coordinator position in Child Welfare Services to help facilitate the placement efforts of County social service workers as they search for suitable facilities to place the children in their care. A resource coordinator would have familiarity with all placement facilities throughout the county, know what facility currently has available openings, and maintain, by priority, the waiting list(s) for client placement.

Response: This recommendation is being implemented in part. The new substance abuse services design has several positions with duties similar to those of a “resource coordinator”:

- 2.0 FTE contract staff- ensuring coverage at each of the regional court houses- who will assist parents with immediate referrals to treatment, and
- .5 FTE contract staff to serve as a liaison among the Dependency Drug Court, parents’ attorneys, CWS, and treatment programs.

Creating a resource coordinator position to address child placement issues will not be pursued. The SARMS program did not impact child placement processes in Child Welfare Services, so its elimination has no effect on current practice. CWS has implemented best practices to ensure that the best possible decisions are made in placing children in out of home care.

Recommendation 10-58: Ensure that all Child Welfare Services social workers are informed as to the modification of the SARMS Program and how the changes affect them.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. CWS will continue to keep social workers informed on any significant program changes. The March edition of the monthly Centralized Child Welfare Staff Newsletter, which was sent to all CWS staff on March, 30, 2010, included an article on the SARMS redesign. On May 6, 2010, a global e-mail was sent to all CWS staff describing the redesign and its related training dates. On June 1, 2010, a Special Notice (policy and procedure instructions for CWS staff) was e-mailed to all CWS staff and posted on the CWS intranet. All subsequent information related to substance abuse services will be issued electronically and timely.

Recommendation 10-59: Provide clear and concise training guidelines to all County social workers who will be involved with the case management aspect of the modified SARMS Program.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. As noted in the County’s response to recommendation 10-58, a training schedule was sent to all staff on May 6, 2010. Training will be available in North County as well as in central San Diego, consisting of two 3-hour modules on “Substance Abuse and Child Welfare Assessment,” and “Substance Abuse and Child Welfare Case Planning.” Seven sessions of each module will be offered. In addition, substance abuse training will be offered for future classes of new social workers, as well as make-up and ongoing training sessions.

Commendation: The 2009/2010 San Diego County Grand Jury recognizes the exceptional performance by the Director of the Health and Human Services Agency and the Director of Child Welfare Services, and their staffs. During the course of a separate investigation that did

not generate a report, the Grand Jury focused on the issue of disproportionality of minority children in the foster care system and what percentage of these children were in fact reunited with their immediate families. CWS staff, acutely aware of this problem, is actively participating in the California Disproportionality Project and has implemented two region-specific projects to combat the disparity. Though the number of minority children in the foster system is high, the efforts to reunify the family unit is a central focus and the numbers are directly in line with those reflected on the State level. We found that measures are in place to ensure a high probability of family reunifications.

The Director of the Health and Human Services Agency and the Director of Child Welfare Services and their staffs, are hereby recognized for their focus, dedication and exemplary work in both understanding and facing the challenges associated with the issue of disproportionality of minority children in the juvenile justice system, foster care services, and successfully managing family reunification efforts during the height of this budgetary crisis.

Response: The County Health and Human Services Agency's Child Welfare Services division would like to thank the 2009-10 Grand Jury for its generous commendation related to efforts addressing "disproportionality." CWS has worked diligently to address these complex issues over the past several years and appreciates the acknowledgement.
